

THE  
*Christian Prophet and his Work.*

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A  
DISCOURSE

ON  
1 CORINTHIANS XIV. 3.

By ADAM CLARKE.

“So they read in the Book, in the Law of God *distinctly*, and gave the Sense, and  
“*caused* them to UNDERSTAND the READING.” NEH. viii. 8.

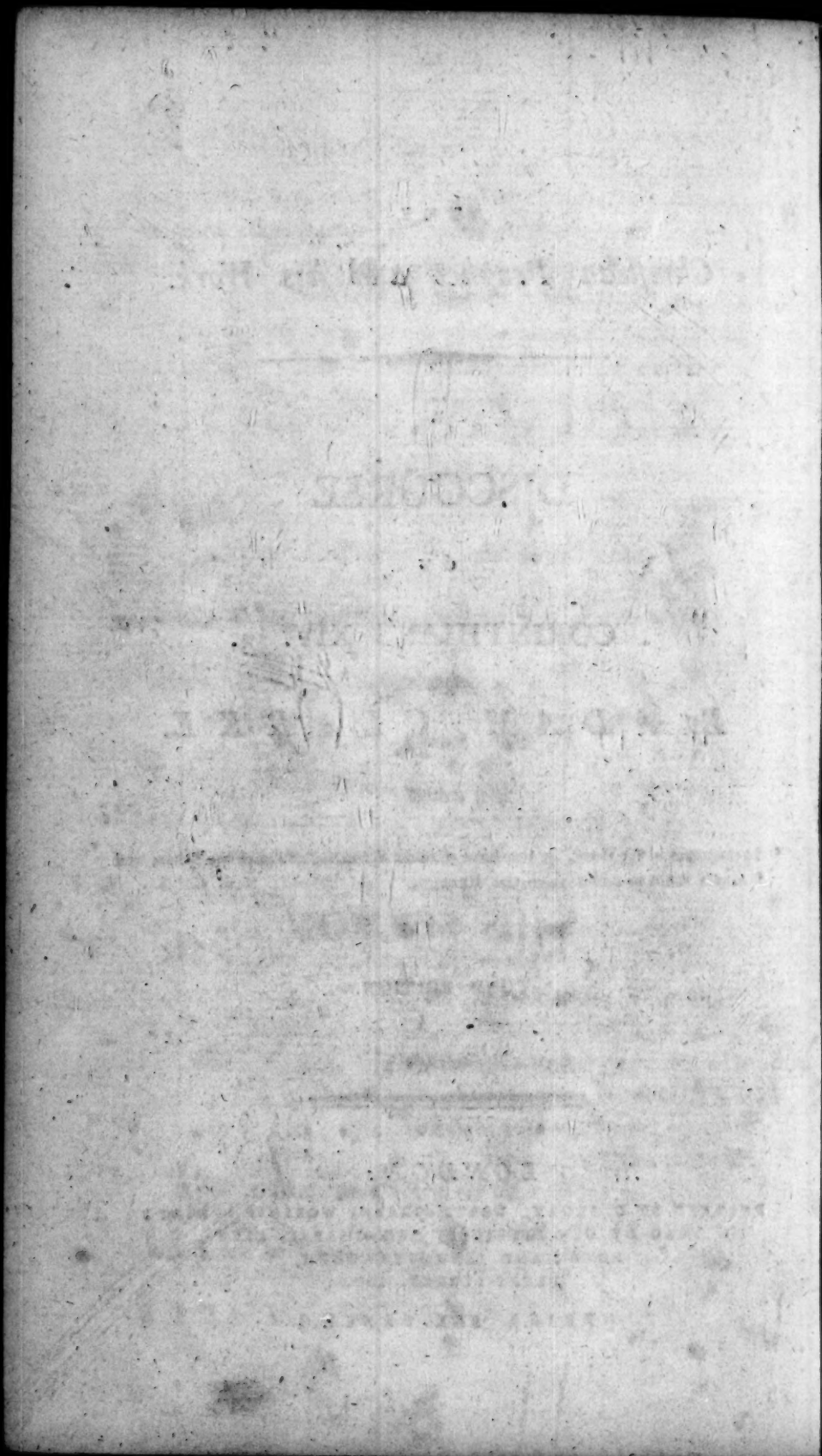
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TO  
ALL THE  
MINISTERS  
OF THE  
EVERLASTING GOSPEL,

Who  
Conscientiously endeavour to speak to Men,  
To EDIFICATION, and to EXHORTATION, and to COMFORT,

Especially  
To those among the People  
called  
METHODISTS,

THIS SERMON

Is respectfully,  
And affectionately  
DEDICATED,

By their Fellow-Labourer,  
In the Vineyard of the Lord,

ADAM CLARKE.

THE  
DIVISION

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## A DISCOURSE

ON

I CORINTHIANS XIV. 3.

*He who prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*

**T**AKE heed how ye hear, was an advice of the Son of God; and forcibly states, that *serious attention* to sacred Truths, is essentially requisite to those who wish to profit by them; and without this, even Christ himself may preach in vain. It was the saying of a wise and holy man, that "the word of God was never heard profitably, but in that Spirit by which it was originally dictated." Long experience has proved, that tho' the mighty Paul may *plant*, and the eloquent Apollos *water*, yet it is God alone who gives the *increase*. Every minister of God should be deeply sensible of this, that he may earnestly implore that *Help* without which no good can be done; that *Wisdom* without which the word of God cannot be rightly divided; and that *Influence* on the minds of his hearers, without which there can be no fruit of his labours.

A Philosopher among the ancient heathens observed, that "Man is an animal fond of novelty:"—the observation readily acquired the force of an incontrovertible

trovertible maxim, because the facts which gave it birth were every where evident. Things *new* or *uncommon* being always found to impress the senses more forcibly than those which daily occur. Man is fond of power, and is ever affecting to perform actions beyond the limits of his own strength; but as repeated exertions, painfully demonstrate to him the littleness of his own might, he strives to have recourse to *foreign help*, and especially grasps at *supernatural powers*. Hence, originated the desire of acquainting himself with the invisible world, that he might associate to himself the energies of supernatural agents, and by their assistance satisfy his criminal curiosity, and gratify his pride and ambition: And hence the pretensions to potent spells, necromantic incantations, and the whole system of magic. It was in consequence of giving unrestrained scope to this principle, that miraculous powers were more earnestly coveted in ancient, (and I may add, in modern) times, than the constant ability to do good through that influence which can come from God *alone*, working by that love which never faileth.

That miraculous gifts were largely distributed in the primitive church, and especially among the believers at Corinth, is sufficiently evident,---and that they were *preferred* by some to that *love* which is the *fulfilling of the law*, is too plainly intimated in this epistle. The gift of divers tongues, or a supernatural capacity of speaking various languages which a man had not learnt, seems to have prevailed in the christian church for a considerable time after the day of Pentecost. And several mistaking the *design* of the Lord in the communication of these gifts, wished to possess the miraculous power merely for *its own sake*, and not on account of the *good* which might be done by it.--- Hence, if they *spake with tongues*, (various languages,)

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it was deemed sufficient, notwithstanding those who heard were not edified, because they did not understand the language which was spoken. The Apostle shews, that acting in this way did not fulfil the kind intention of the Most High; as speaking of the deep things of God in the language of an *Arab*, was not calculated to instruct a *Greek*, to whom that language was utterly unknown. And tho' they might appear more excellent in their own eyes, because possessing more of that knowledge, which too often puffeth up, (to which it appears that some even of the believing *Greeks* were too much attached,) yet the Apostle assures them, that greater was he, in the sight of God, whose talent led to general instruction, than he, who possessed the tongue of the learned, whether his knowledge were acquired by study, or came by divine inspiration:---For the grand design of the gospel-ministry was, *to instruct men in righteousness, to unite them to God, and comfort them in all tribulations and adversities*: And this appears to me, to be the meaning of the words of the text; *He who prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*

Two things the Apostle presents here to our view.

I. The PROPHET: *He who prophesieth.*

II. His WORK: *He speaketh unto men, to edification, exhortation, and comfort.*

I. The word *Prophet*, generally conveys the idea of a person so far acquainted with futurity, as to discern some purpose of the divine Being relative to his government of the natural or moral world; but which is not sufficiently matured by the œconomy of Providence, to make, as yet, its public appearance among men:---and to *prophecy*, is usually understood to imply, the *foretelling* such an event, the *time* of its appearance, and the *place* of its operation, with some preceding and subsequent circumstances.

That several of those who are termed *Prophets* in the sacred writings, did *thus* predict future events, is a Truth which cannot be successfully contested.--- A Truth which successive ages have had the fullest opportunity of confirming---which stands as an immense and impregnable Bulwark against all the pretensions and sophisms of modern deism, and which perhaps, the present eventful period, tends not less, to confirm, than any of the preceding ones.

But that this was the *original*, and *only meaning* of the word Prophet, or Prophecy, is very far from being clear. The first place the word occurs is, Gen. xx. 7. where the Lord says of Abraham to Abimelech, *He is a prophet*, (נביא הוא *nabi hu*) and *will pray* (יִתְפַּלֵּל *yith-pallel*, will make earnest intercession,) *for thee*. In the common acceptation of the word, it is certain Abraham was *no Prophet*: But here it seems to signify a man well acquainted with the supreme Being, capable of teaching others in divine things, and especially, a *Man of Prayer*,---one who had great influence with the God he worshipped, and whose *intercessions* were available in the behalf of others. And in this sense the original word נביא *nabi*, is used in several places in the Old Testament.

It was through inattention to this meaning of the word, which appears to me, to be the true, original, and ideal one, that all the Commentators and Critics that I have met with, have been so sadly puzzled with that part of the history of Saul which is related 1 Sam. x. 9---13. and xix. 20---24. In these passages, the sacred Historian represents Saul, who was neither a Prophet, nor the son of one, associating with the Prophets, and *propheying among them*:---to which he was led, *by the Spirit of the Lord which came upon him*. That this can mean no more than *Prayer and Supplication* to God, accompanied probably



bably with edifying *hymns of praise*, and *thanksgiving*, (for they had instruments of music, chap. x. ver. 5,) needs, in my opinion, little proof. If Saul had *prophefied* in the common acceptation of the word, it is not likely that we should have been kept absolutely in the dark concerning the subject and design of his predictions: Of which, by the way, not one syllable is spoken in the oracles of God. The simple fact seems to have been this. God, who had chosen this man to govern Israel, designed to teach *him*, that the Most High alone is the fountain of all power, and that by him only, kings could reign, so as properly to execute justice, and be his ministers for good unto the people: To accomplish this gracious purpose, *he gave him another heart*, (ver. 9,) a disposition totally different from what he had ever before possessed, and taught him *to pray*. Coming among the sons of the Prophets, on whom the Spirit of the Lord rested, and who were under the instruction of Samuel, (chap. xix. 20.) while they worshipped God with music and supplication, Saul also was made a partaker of the same divine influence, and *prophefied*, i. e. made prayer and supplication among them. To see one who did not belong to the prophetic school, *thus* incorporated with the Prophets, pouring out his soul to God in prayer and supplication, was an unusual sight which could not pass unnoticed, especially by those of Saul's acquaintance, who probably knew him in times past to have been as careless and as ungodly as themselves, (for it was only *now* he got that other good spirit from God, a sufficient proof that he had it not *before*;) these companions of his being unacquainted with that grace which can in a moment influence and change the heart, would, according to an invariable custom, express their astonishment with a sneer; *Is SAUL also among the Prophets!* That is, in modern language: "Can *this*



*this man pray or preach?* He whose education has been the same as our own---employed in the same secular offices, and formerly companion with us in what he now affects to call folly and sin---Can such a person be among the Prophets?" Yes. For God may have *given him a new heart*, and the *Spirit of God*, whose inspiration *alone* can give sound understanding in sacred things, may have *come upon him* for this very purpose, that he might announce unto *you* the Righteousness of the Lord, and speak unto your ruined souls, *to edification, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*

I have dwelt longer on the case of Saul among the prophets, because it appears to be exactly similar to a case mentioned in this chapter, and to which my text is closely allied: "If any prophesy, and there come in one that *believeth not*, or one *unlearned*, he is *convinced of all*, he is judged of all; and thus are the *secrets* of his heart *manifested*; and of FALLING DOWN on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is among you of a truth," verses, 24, 25. Who does not see here a *parallel* case to Saul among the prophets? especially if collated with 1 Sam. xix. 20.---24. "And Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing presiding over them, the Spirit of God *came upon* the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise: And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. And Saul went to Naioth of Ramah, and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied---and he *stripped off* his clothes, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and *lay down naked*, all that day, and all that night. Wherefore, they say, (as in the case related, chap. x,) Is Saul also among the Prophets!"

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I have often observed in public-meetings among religious people, especially in meetings for *Prayer*, that persons wholly unconcerned about the matter in hand, or its issue, have been suddenly seized by the spirit of the supplicants, while vacantly staring at those employed in the sacred work; and *falling down* on their knees, have acknowledged the power and presence of the Most High, and like Saul among the prophets, have gone on, supplicating with them, with a renewed heart and a right spirit.

Those who have taken on them unmercifully to criticize and condemn such meetings, should prove, in vindication of their own conduct, that Saul, the sons of the prophets, and the venerable Samuel at their head, were *enthusiasts* and *fanatics*, and that the parallel case in this chapter, should have been marked by the Apostle, with terms of abhorrence and detestation, that others might be aware of copying their example.

The history of Elijah and the priests of Baal, mentioned in 1 Kings xviii, throws farther light on this subject. In verse 26, it is said, "They, (the priests of Baal,) took a bullock and dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us!--And they leaped upon the altar,---and cried aloud,---and cut themselves with knives, till the blood gushed out:---and they *prophefied*, (וַיִּנְבְּאוּ *vayithnabeu*, and they made supplication,) until the time of the evening sacrifice." From the whole context it is plain, that *earnest, importunate prayer*, is alone what is meant by *prophefying* in this text.

In addition to what has been said, it is necessary to observe, that, *prophet*, in the text, means not only one, who according to the original import of the word, is an *intercessor*, or a *man of prayer*, which is an essential characteristic of every minister of the gospel; but it means also one, who *teaches others* the great and glorious

glorious science of salvation, and *instructs* men in their religious obligations to God, and in their duty to their neighbour and to themselves: And this is undoubtedly the sense in which St. Paul uses it here. And as all the prophets of God, whose principal business it was to *instruct* the people in the way of righteousness, were *men of prayer*, who were continually interceding with God in behalf of the wretched and careless to whom they ministered, the term נביא *nabi*, became their common appellative; and thus a *part* of their office, *intercessors for the people*, might have given rise to that name, by which the Spirit of God thought proper afterwards to distinguish those whom he sent, not only to *pray for* and *instruct* the people, but also to *predict* those future events which concerned the punishment of the incorrigible, and the comfort and exaltation of his own servants.

A preacher who is not a *man of prayer*, cannot have a proper knowledge of the nature and design of the gospel-ministry:---cannot be alive to God in his own soul; nor is likely to become instrumental in the salvation of others. In order to *do good*, a man must *receive good*: *Prayer* is the way in which divine assistance is received; and in the work of the ministry, no man can do any thing, unless it be given him from above. In many cases, the success of a preacher's labours, depends more on his prayers than on his public teaching.

In the sense in which I apprehend St. Paul uses the word here, our blessed Lord styles John the Baptist a *Prophet*, Luke vii. 26: And Zacharias his father, speaking of him by the Spirit of the Lord, calls him a *prophet of the Highest*, Luke i. 76, i. e. a teacher commissioned by the Lord himself, to instruct the inhabitants of Judea, in the things which related to the manifestation

manifestation of the Messiah, and his kingdom: therefore, in ver. 77, the matter of his teaching is said to be *γινώσκis σωτηρίας*, the SCIENCE of SALVATION. Men are *ignorant* of God and themselves,---they must be *instructed*, and for this very purpose, the christian ministry has been established among men. *Human sciences* may be profitable in earthly concerns, but cannot profit the soul. The *science* that teaches godliness must come from God. No *science* is of any avail to the soul, that does not bring *salvation* with it.---This is the excellence of heavenly *teaching*, and an excellence that is peculiar to itself.

In the same sense, Judas and Silas are said to be prophets, (Acts xv. 32.) whose business it was, to *exhort* and *confirm the brethren*. See also 1 Kings xviii. 29.

After what has been said, it is almost superfluous to observe, that as the ministers of the gospel are termed *prophets* or *teachers*, it is necessarily supposed, 1st, That they are properly acquainted with the nature and design of the gospel they teach. And 2ndly, That men in general are ignorant of the things which concern the kingdom of God.

That he who professes to teach a science to others, should be well instructed in it himself, all must allow.---And that the mass of the people who even profess christianity, are deplorably ignorant of God and his gospel, is a melancholy truth. But heavenly things cannot be apprehended by the same unassisted powers which apprehend earthly things;---to acquire a proper knowledge of an Art or Science, there must be a natural *aptitude* in the mind to receive it: And where *this* exists not, the most judicious instructions of the most eminent teachers, are lost. Man has no *natural* aptitude to heavenly things: The *carnal mind*, says the Apostle, (i. e. the soul which relishes nothing but what comes through the medium of the flesh, and which tends only to gratify its desires,) *knows*



*knows not the things of God;---it is enmity against God; it is not only ignorant of divine things, but it loves that which is evil, and abhors that which is good: Therefore, the very first part of the teacher's work is to convince men of this, and of its ruinous tendency, and to shew them the necessity of applying to God through the blood of the cross, who alone can make them wise unto salvation, conquer their aversion to holiness, subdue their evil passions, and save their souls.*

In order to *persuade* men to receive the wisdom that comes from God, there must be precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little, according to varying circumstances, and the prejudices and capacities of the people who are to be taught. To succeed in this, as far as *man* can succeed, the teacher must be endued with the spirit of *love*, producing the living flame of holy zeal, *attaching* to itself *prudence* and *discretion*, which shall cause the sacred fire to burn *steady*, while *love* to God and man, continues to feed the *flame*. Constant supplications must precede, accompany, and follow his efforts to guide sinners into the way: And as God is thus acknowledged throughout the work, so will he be with him in it; and under such a ministry, men cannot fail being made wise unto salvation, God giving a constant power to *apprehend*, while his faithful ambassador is holding forth the words of life. But who is sufficient for these things? He *alone* whom God hath *sent*; to whom He hath entrusted the ministry of reconciliation, and whose word he conveyeth with the demonstration of his Spirit to the souls of the people.

II. The *WORK* of this *prophet* or *teacher*, or what is wrought under his ministry, comes now to be more particularly considered. The text says, *he speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*

I. To



I. To EDIFICATION. The original word οἰκοδομεῖν, is upon the whole, properly enough rendered *edification*: But as this is a mere *latin* word, the *translation* itself requires to be *translated*, as it is as unintelligible to many people as the *Greek* word itself. They both literally signify, *to make, or build a house*. The soul of man is often represented in Scripture, under the figure of a building. This metaphor is frequent in the writings of St. Paul; partly because it was peculiarly expressive; and partly because such an idea must frequently occur to his mind who was himself a *tent-maker*, σκηνοποιός, such a person as we term *house-carpenter*. Hear him recurring to this metaphor on various occasions: *We who are in this TABERNACLE do groan:--Ye are God's BUILDING:--If the earthly HOUSE of this TABERNACLE were destroyed, we have a HOUSE not MADE with HANDS:--As a wise MASTER-BUILDER, I lay the FOUNDATION, &c. &c.*

This *house* God formed in the beginning for his own temple.---In it he dwelt, and in it, a sacrifice worthy of his immaculate purity, and infinite Majesty, was constantly offered up.---But alas! man being in this honour, continued not---*Sin* was introduced---the temple became defiled---the Lord abandoned it, Satan entered in, and the house of the Lord was laid in ruins. To *re-edify, or re-build* this house, and make it once more a habitation of God through the Spirit, the Almighty Saviour descended from heaven, and dwelt σκηνώσας, *made a tabernacle* among men: thus shewing us, by dwelling in our nature, in holiness, purity, and truth, that we might again become a holy temple of the Lord, and be raised by his grace to that state of moral-excellence and glory, which we had in the beginning: himself being the *Pattern* after which he purposed to re-edify the building. But  
though,

though the human soul be in a state of ruin, and the *form* and *comeliness* of the building be passed away; yet not *one* of the original *materials* is *lost*:---to follow the metaphor---the *stones* and *timbers* are still in existence: But they are all *displaced* and *disjointed*; and none but the divine *Architect* can revive these out of the rubbish, and restore the form and comeliness of the *edifice*. To effect this, the *Foundation* must be again laid; the *stones* cleansed and replaced; and the *timbers* rejointed. Now, other foundation can no man lay, so as to have a solid, perfect, and durable building, but that which is laid already, viz. CHRIST crucified; and HIM, not only as the *meritorious cause* of the building, and great *Operator* in it: but also as the *Pattern* according to which the house is to be formed. All that is of Christ, *resembles* him. When the ruined soul is built *up, on, through, and after* him, the excellence of the materials, the regular adjustment of the parts, the form, beauty, magnificence and utility of the whole, at once proclaim, the infinite skill, unlimited power, and eternal love of the great Architect. "But if Christ be the sole builder, &c. what has the teacher to do in this work?" Tho' he who prophesieth or teacheth, cannot be properly stiled THE BUILDER, yet he speaks unto men ως οικοδομου *in reference* to this building, recommending JESUS as the *only* Saviour, and speaking of the glory and excellence of *his* work.

It is not less necessary to build *on* the foundation than to *lay* it. Many grievously err on this point.--- They are ever *laying the foundation*; and never *building on it*: And strange to tell, this only is allowed by some, to be *preaching Christ*! as if one should say; "He who is determined to build a proper and convenient house for *himself* to *dwell in*, can never effect his purpose but by *laying the foundation every day as long*

long as he lives." Who does not see that this man can never have a *house*? He has no more than its *foundation*, and can never be its *inhabitant*.

Let not this saying be misrepresented---as if the preacher designed to leave *Christ* out of his building;---No. He is as fully convinced that on the gospel plan, no soul can be saved but through the *blood* of his cross, and *influence* of his *Spirit*, as he is, that a house cannot be built without a *foundation*. But he argues, that as the foundation should be *laid*, and kept *lying*, once for all, and the building raised upon it; so Christ Jesus as the Foundation-Stone, as the only Name through which men can be saved, should be laid once for all: And when it appears, that this foundation *is laid*, viz. when the sinner trusts on him *alone* for salvation, renouncing *all dependence* on things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth:---and when it appears, that his faith hath not stood in the *wisdom of man*, but in the *power of God*, (being justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus, for then, and not till then is the foundation truly laid :) I say, when this fully appears, from that moment, the minister of God who understands his work, and attends to it, will speak unto that soul to *edification*.

But let it not be supposed that the Lord Jesus has nothing to do with the building, but merely to be its *support*.---He is still not only the *foundation*, without which the house must be immediately involved in its primitive ruin, but also the great *Director* of the whole work. As he came before *by blood*, so he comes now *by water* and *by the Spirit*; by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. As it was only by his *sacrifice* that the *Atonement* was made, so it is only by his *direction* and *energy*, that even the wisest master-builder can raise on this foundation a superstructure of gold, silver, and precious stones; for without him nothing

good can be done. But the great mistake of many is, the preaching Christ, only as the *Author* of salvation, without showing him to be the *Accomplisher* of it: proving, indeed well, that it is Christ that *justifies*, but not maintaining fully that his blood *cleanseth from all unrighteousness*. What Christ has done *for* us, is a favourite subject with many; but what Christ is to do *in* us, is a topic, well considered but by few.

In those who are faithful, Christ accomplishes his great design:---They are *built up*---the house is completed, and becomes a habitation of God through the Spirit---a temple of the ever-blessed Trinity:---For it is written, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and I and the FATHER will come *in* unto him, and make our *abode* with him." Hence it appears, that the *end* which the Lord proposes in this great work, is the *full* salvation of the soul---the cleansing and purifying it from all evil; reducing it to harmony and order, that it may be compleat in him;---for the man of God must be perfect, (*αγιος* well-jointed,) thoroughly furnished to every good work.

From this view of the subject, we may easily discern what *edification* means. It is the *building up* of the soul in the knowledge, love, and image of God. And *continual* edification, implies, a constant *growth* in grace---a daily *increase* of those graces which constitute the mind of Christ---a constant addition to the former stock, so that he who believes, and continues faithful, *increases* with all the increase of God. Thus to his faith, is *added* virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance---brotherly-kindness, and charity; pure universal love to God and man. As every *new* stone that is laid in a building, *adds* something to it, and brings it nearer its perfection; so every sermon, every act of faith---of prayer---of mercy and kindness, becomes a mean in the hand of the Lord, of *increasing*



*creasing* the light, life, and love of the believing soul: hence, to be *edified*, does not mean merely, that a man has received some *new information* on a divine subject, some increased light in sacred matters; but it means, that the man's house (following the metaphor) has got another stone added to it; another of its *scattered timbers* put in *joint*.---In a word, that something heavenly is *added* to what was before received.

As every individual thus *edified* by the grace of Christ, becomes a temple of God, so the whole Church or assembly of the first-born, form a vast and grand building, in which Jesus lives and reigns. *Each* who was individually a temple of God, becoming a stone, or part of this *general* building. Therefore, fully to understand what the Apostle says on this subject, 1 Pet. ii. 5, "Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house," &c. form the idea of a number of souls *edified* as before stated, *built up* in faith and love, in inward and outward holiness---*united* in the bands of christian fellowship, and walking in the consolations of the Holy Ghost.---These are the *lively stones*, instinct with the living virtue of the living God.---These are built up a spiritual house, each is considered a stone in the sacred edifice, and a necessary and beautiful part of the building. Their *places* may be different---some *within*, some *without*; some in the *back-part* of the building, others in the *front*; some *corner-stones*, uniting and strengthening the building; others *head-stones*, finishing and perfecting the work. All are arranged, and employed, not only according to their several degrees of grace, but also according to their various talents; nevertheless, the whole collectively form, but *one* building, the genuine *catholic* or *universal Church*, whose inhabitant is the Most High God.

In order to erect this glorious building, we are told by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xii. 28, that "God hath appointed



in his Church, first, Apostles, secondarily, Prophets, thirdly, Teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversity of tongues." And all this is done, that being built up on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, who made Jesus Christ the chief Corner-Stone, all the building (through him) might be fitly framed together (*συναρμολογούμενη* properly jointed, harmonized, and arranged) and grow into a holy temple in the Lord. Eph. ii. 20, 21.

Thus, they who *prophecy* speak unto men to *edification*, that they may be *built up* together for a habitation (*κατοικητήριον* a constant dwelling-place) of God through the Spirit.

II. But he who *prophesieth* speaketh also to men, to *Exhortation*.

According to the common acceptation of this word, viz. *advising a sinner to turn from his sins, and come to GOD for Salvation*; this part of the teacher's work, must, in the nature and order of grace, precede *edification*. But the word *παρακλησις* must not be restrained to so limited a meaning in this place: from its component parts, *παρα*, near to, and *καλεω*, I call, we may learn, that it implies *calling the soul near to God*, that it may contract an intimacy with him, be united to, and be continually defended, nourished, and supported by him: and this indeed is the proper business of *exhortation*.

As this discovers to us another part of the teacher's work, so it gives us another view of the state of a soul that is not made a partaker of the salvation of God. Man is at a distance from his Maker, not in respect of place, (for God fills the heavens and the earth, and in him we all live, move, and have our being,) but in respect of nature, unity of mind, and conformity of purpose. There is no good in man, nor can there be any, while  
*separated*

*separated* from God, and united to sin. God is pure and holy; man is earthly, sensual, devilish :---living only in reference to earth; seeking only the gratification of his animal desires, and being constantly impelled by diabolic influence to break the commandments of his God. In a greater or less degree, this is the state of every soul of man; for all,---ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and there is none that doeth good, no not one, saith the Lord. The sacred writings uniformly represent men as rebels against God; obstinately bent on the pursuit of those things which tend directly to their present misery and future destruction: and the conduct of men in general demonstrates that the character is fairly and faithfully drawn. Notwithstanding, there are many who are unwilling to allow that this is a true state of the case; and to get rid of this degrading character of themselves; reject the whole system of Revelation, and forge for themselves another character from what they term *Natural Religion*; a system which they acknowledge did not come from above, for *Revelation* they will have nothing to do with; and yet, *this*, they would have others to receive and submit to, as implicitly, as if it had come recommended by all the wisdom and authority of God.

Mr. Woolaston, the celebrated author of "The Religion of Nature delineated," begins his tract thus: "The *foundation* of Religion, lies in that *difference* between the acts of men, which distinguishes them into *good, evil, and indifferent*; and if there be such a difference, there must be a Religion, and *e contra*. Upon this account it is, that such a long and laborious enquiry hath been made after some general *idea*, or some *rule*, by comparing the aforesaid acts with which, it might appear to which kind they respectively belong. And though men have not yet agreed upon any one, yet one there certainly must be. That which I am going to propose, &c."

On this point the following conclusive mode of arguing has been adopted. 'If the foundation of Religion lie in the *difference* of human actions; and that difference can only appear by comparing them with some *rule*; and though from the beginning of the world to this day, no such rule of moral good and evil *has yet been agreed upon*, whereby men might know to which *kind* their actions respectively belong, it is impossible there should be any such thing as *natural religion* or law, because their very essence consists in enabling men to *distinguish* their actions, (and thereby their choice of acting,) whether they are virtues or crimes, moral good or moral evil: If they had no *rule* for this, they had *no law*, and if no law, they could have no *religion*, which is nothing but obedience to law: Or, if "they never *agreed upon one*," and without *agreement* there can be no *rule*, then there is nothing in this subject obviously clear, universal, or true; but all the definitions of it must be *opinion* or *falsehood*, because they had no *rule* or method to frame them by. Or, "since a rule there certainly must be," if Mr. Woolaston found it out, then all the preceding ages wanted it, there was no such thing existing; therefore, this inference is fair, Mr. Woolaston's discovery is the religion of Mr. Woolaston, and not the *religion of nature*. And, if *he* first made the discovery, how could it be owing to *reason*, since the light of reason was as clear 5000 years ago, as it is now? And if it was not from *reason* that he argued so well, and traced out the lineaments of law with such order and perspicuity, then it must be from *revelation*. And that single passage which he has taken for the *foundation* of his work, tears up the foundation of his whole system; and is a demonstration that whatever he says after, is not from *reason*, *nature*, *eternal fitnesses*, or *universal consent*, but from *revelation* alone; and that he has only transferred to the support of one school what he learnt in the other.'

This

This poor baseless system, attempts to speak unto fallen man, *to exhortation and comfort*; but in such a way as his *enemy* could wish. It expatiates on his *dignity and perfection*; the strength and energy of his *reason*, (though for 5000 years it has not been able to discover a *rule* of moral conduct,) and shews him his *duty* as it is termed, attempting to prove, that he is *naturally inclined* to all good; and that it is only from the influence of *example*, that he is at any time warped from doing that which is holy and just. It tells him he has ample resources in himself to conquer any evil propensity he may have *acquired*; for *internal* evil he has none;---that to act upon this plan, is to get free from the shackles of *folly* and *superstition*, and to enjoy peace of mind and lasting content.

This, according to them, is the supreme good.--- But is there a particle of truth in this meagre system? Is not the whole, demonstrably a mere phantom, "an airy nothing, without a local habitation or a name?" Where is their certainty? Where is their comfort?--- Ask the whole tribe of modern *deists*, and their *elder brethren the Heathen*.---But still, it is an *important something*!---Then it is a *something* that has neither *God nor Christ* in it.---*Christ* it has not: for it denies and ridicules his *incarnation, miracles, and atonement*. *God* it has not, for it denies both the *necessity and existence* of supernatural *influence*.---And yet it is good! It is an *effect* that subsists without a *cause*:---a *stream* that is full, and constantly running without a producing *fountain*.---It is a *rational Religion*, in eternal hostility to *reason*: It will not allow, that man is at a *distance* from *God*; and yet it will not admit that he is *nigh*. *Union* with *God* through the influence of his *Spirit*, is with it, *enthusiasm*; and to say, that man is a *fallen spirit*, and utterly incapable of recovering himself from his ruinous state, is the language of *reason and common sense*, and therefore must not be countenanced. The  
conclusion



conclusion from its leading principles is, man is not *evil*, for the scripture account of his *fall* is a fable :--- he is not *good*, for there is no *inspiration* of a Divine Spirit. In a word, he is like some of those who have invented the absurd system,---*Nothing*, or *good for nothing*.

But to return. As *exhortation* implies *calling near* to God, and supposes a *distance* between him and the sinner, as stated before ; so it implies bringing God *near* to the soul. God was *in Christ* reconciling the world to himself---and where two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, he is in the midst of them.---He who speaketh unto men unto *exhortation*, can assure them that the kingdom of God is *at hand*---and that God *waits* to be gracious, and rejoices over them to do them good : therefore, the trembling sinner may come with boldness unto the Throne of Grace, and ask mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. *Draw nigh*, therefore, to God ; and let it be remembered, that *drawing nigh* implies turning the desires of the heart towards him, (my son, give me thy heart !) entering into his gracious counsels and designs ; and accepting, as a lost sinner, the ample salvation purchased by the blood of the Cross.

*Exhortation* of this nature is peculiarly needful : and indeed must precede the building up, first spoken of,) because every awakened sinner is *afraid* of God, and like the penitent publican, stands *afar off*, not daring to *approach* even the *place* where God records his name ; and it is a secret, which is not with all men, to know how to represent Christ as *present*, and to bring the trembling soul *even to his seat*. When a sinner considers God as throned in unsufferable light and glory ; infinitely full of holiness and justice ; he dares not *draw near* ;---but when he views the light of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ ; when he is *persuaded*, that, *God is Love*,  
he



he is then inspired with confidence, and coming by Christ Jesus, he approaches the Eternal Deity, with humble boldness, through the medium of his own nature; for God was manifest in the *flesh*! But this part of the teacher's work, as was hinted before, must not be restrained merely to those who know not God. Every believer in Christ Jesus stands in need of it.---What is the general voice of the gospel, but a continual *call* to men, to *come unto God*! What is the whole of salvation, but a *drawing nigh to him*, in consequence of the invitations received from his word and from his ministers? What is endless glory, but an eternal *approach* to the infinite perfections of the Godhead! The sinner is invited to *draw near*: the believer is invited to draw *nearer*.---The sinner who receives not this *exhortation*, cannot be saved: the saint who does not continue to receive it, cannot stand:---Thus sinners and saints are the continual objects of *exhortation*. Sacred system of eternal Truth! River of God! whose streams make glad the holy city! Thou provest, that by bringing God *down* unto man, man is brought *up* unto God, made a partaker of the Divine Nature, and seated on the throne of his glory!---But this leads me to speak of another important part of the teacher's office, which is,

### III. *To speak unto men to comfort.*

The word *παράμυθος* here used, signifies properly, that comfort which a person receives *conversing face to face* with his friend.---Speaking words of comfort, descriptive of those good things, the existence of which we are assured of; and the promise of which we receive on indubitable authority.

This part of the teacher's work, includes not only his *loving, affectionate manner* of preaching the gospel; but also his *visiting* from house to house,---his hearing and determining what were formerly called *cases of conscience*,---

*conscience*,---his searching into, and removing those scruples which arise from the power of temptation, in the minds of those who are but *beginning* to walk in the way of life. These require the speediest and tenderest aid of the christian prophet, who has himself been comforted in all his tribulations, and is hereby enabled to comfort others, by the comfort with which he himself has been comforted of God, 2 Cor. i. 4.

The *Promises* of the everlasting gospel furnish the teacher with abundant matter for the consolation of the distressed, both in public and private.---There is not a *state* of affliction or trial into which a person can be brought, but has some promise of comfort or support annexed to it in the sacred writings. *Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest*, is a promise, of general application; and as Luther once said of a similar one, "is worthy to be carried from Rome to Jerusalem on one's knees." Indeed, the whole gospel of God is one grand system of *consolation*; hence, it is properly adapted to the state of *suffering* humanity. Man is a *wretched* creature; and his state of *misery* is necessarily implied in the text. He cannot be *happy* because he is *unholy*, and holiness and happiness are joined in eternal union by the Lord. As God is the fountain of all blessedness, no intelligent being can be happy, but in *union* with himself. Sin prevents this *union* from taking place; for God can join himself to nothing but what resembles his own nature. As nothing but sin prevents this union from taking place, the teacher of righteousness can speak to *comfort*, by proclaiming that divine grace, that not only *atones* for, but *destroys* sin; and, which is *glad-tidings* of great joy to all people.

It is much to be lamented, that the benevolent gospel of the Son of God, is represented by many as a system of *austerity* and *terror*; but no man can represent it as such,

such, who understands it. If, knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men, it is not by these terrors we prevail on them to accept salvation through Christ. The place of torment is uncovered in the sacred scripture, that men may see and escape from it: And the teacher of righteousness should only describe the *devil*, and his reign of *misery*, so, as to cause men to fall in love with *Christ*, and his heaven of *glory*.

Many seem to have hell and destruction for a constant text; and all their sermons are grounded on these subjects. These may alarm the careless, and terrify the profane, and so they are useful in their place; but they certainly do not *speake to men to comfort*:---nor should all their discourses be employed in this way. It is the doctrine of JESUS, of Jesus dying for our sins, and rising for our justification;---Jesus shedding his love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, filling us with the meek, holy, gentle mind that was in himself, that ever can be available to a sinner's conversion and comfort. From long experience I can testify, that preaching the dying love of Christ who bought us, is of more avail to convert sinners, comfort the distressed, and build up believers in their most holy faith, than all the fire of hell! For, as it is possible to make void the *law*, through a lawless method of preaching *faith*; so it is possible to make void the *gospel*, by an unevangelized preaching of the *law* and its *terrors*. Let the law be used as God uses it;---let it *enter*, that the offence may *abound*, and that sin may appear *exceeding sinful*:---then, let the veil be taken away from off the face of the gospel, and let its heavenly splendors shine forth on the wretched.---Tell them, prove to them, that *God is Love*; that he *delights* not in the death of a sinner; and that he *wills* all to be saved, and come to the knowledge of his Truth.---Let the sinner's astonished soul contemplate the *fullest proofs*, that even God himself could give

give of his *willingness* to save men, viz. the *agony* and *bloody sweat*, the *cross* and *passion*, the *terrible death*, and *glorious resurrection* of the Almighty Jesus!---Let him who prophesieth, shew these to the vilest, the most profligate, and the most wretched of sinners, and then let them disbelieve the Philanthropy of God, if they can.

“ But,” says one, “ I am a sinner, condemned by the law of God, and condemned by my own conscience : for, having broken the law, I am under the curse.” Granted. But the gospel proclaims JESUS ; and Jesus SAVES sinners. “ But I deserve no mercy.” True : but the gospel speaks not of the *merits* of *man*, but of the *merits* of *Christ*.---It is because thou art a sinner that thou hast need of him :---and hadst thou not been such, Jesus needed not to have died for *thee*.---Again, it is because thou art a *sinner*, that thou hast a *claim* on his *mercy* ; and that very thing (thy guiltiness) which thou conceivest to be an argument against thee, and an insuperable barrier to thy salvation, is an unanswerable argument in thy behalf ; and an absolute proof, that if thou come unto him who died for thee, thou shalt not perish, but have everlasting life. In compassion to thy weakness, and to shew thee that *God is Love*, he hath promised thee life ; and bound himself by his *oath* to fulfil the *promise* he hath made:---that through these two immutable things, (his *oath* and *promise*,) in either of which it is impossible for God to lie, thou mightest have strong *consolation*, while fleeing to lay hold on the hope set before thee in the gospel. Thus, the testimonies of Christ *encourage*, and thus, he who prophesieth, speaketh unto men to *comfort*. Lord of the Universe ! what hast thou not done to save men ? And yet, dreadful obstinacy ! they will not come unto thee that they might have life !

After



After all, it is only Christ who can speak *to the heart* :---who can give the word of *promise*, its *form*, *substance*, and *fulfilment*, in the soul. To get this done, the teacher, as stated in the beginning of this discourse, must be *a man of prayer*, that he may bring the *Spirit*, as well as the *word* of Christ, into his public ministrations. Then, an unction will accompany his word, and all his hearers shall be evidences, that this teacher *speaketh unto men, to edification, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*

From what has been said, we may learn,

*First*, That every minister of God is divinely taught--is made wise to salvation himself, and filled with the Holy Ghost and with prayer.

*Secondly*, That he who receives the gospel, is translated from the kingdom of darkness, sin, folly, and error, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

*Thirdly*, That the *Religion of Christ*, does not consist in a system of opinions, orthodox, or heterodox, but is a principle that *edifies*, that *builds-up* the soul in knowledge and love :---that takes sin *from* it, and *adds* holiness to it.

*Fourthly*, That the gospel *unites* God and man. It *calls* men to God, and brings God to men, that they may be of one spirit with him.

*Fifthly*, That in consequence of this union, men become partakers of the Divine Nature, escape the contagion that is in the world, and become *truly happy*, because they are *completely holy*.

*Sixthly*, That Christ and him crucified, is the grand *subject* of evangelical preaching; and that nothing but *his gospel*, ever was, or will be, the power of God to the salvation of a lost world.

*Lastly*,

*Lastly*, That where there is a ministry by which men are not made wise unto salvation, saved from sin, and built-up in holiness---united by the Spirit of Christ to the God of heaven, and made happy in his love; *there*, either the *teacher*, or the *matter* of instruction, is not of GOD: for, *he who prophesieth, speaketh*, (according to my text) *to edification, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*

Now unto God only wise, gracious and good, be glory and dominion unto all ages, through Christ Jesus! Amen, and Amen.

Bristol, August 12, 1798.

END



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